Do'ful Eemaan

Weakness of Faith

English Translation

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Introduction

Praise be to Allaah, we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allaah from the evil of our own souls and from our evil deeds. Whomever Allaah guides, none can lead astray, and whomever Allaah leaves astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah alone, with no partner or associate, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger. "O you who believe! Fear Allaah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam (as Muslims), with complete submission to Allaah." [Aal 'Imraan 3:102 – interpretation of the meaning].

"O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him He created his wife (Hawwa), and from them both he created many men and women, and fear Allaah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allaah is Ever an All-Watcher over you." [al-Nisa' 4:1 – interpretation of the meaning]

“O you who believe! Keep your duty to Allaah and fear Him, and speak (always) the truth. He will direct you to do righteous good deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whosoever obeys Allaah and His Messenger, he has indeed achieved a great achievement (i.e., he will be saved from the Hell-fire and made to enter Paradise).” [al-Ahzaab 33:70-71 – interpretation of the meaning].

The phenomenon of weak faith has become very widespread among Muslims, and many people complain about the hardness of their hearts. So often we hear the words, “I feel hardness in my heart,” “I do not find any joy in worship,” “I feel that my faith has hit rock bottom,” “Reading Qur’aan does not move me,” “I fall into sin so easily.” The effects of this affliction can be seen in many people, and this problem is the cause of every disaster and adversity.

The issue of people’s hearts is an important and sensitive issue. The heart is called qalb in Arabic because it changes so quickly and frequently (taqallub – alteration, variation, ups and downs). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The heart (qalb) takes its name from its constant changes (taqallub). The likeness of the heart is that of a feather at the root of a tree, being turned over and over by the wind.” (Reported by Ahmad, 4/408; Saheeh al-Jaami’, 2364). According to another report: “The likeness of the heart is that of a feather in an empty plot of land, being blown over and over by the wind.” (Reported by Ibn Abi ‘Aasim in Kitaab al-Sunnah. No. 227. Its isnaad is saheeh, see Zilaal al-Jannah fi Takhreej al-Sunnah by al-Albaani, 1/102).

Man’s heart changes constantly, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) described: “The heart of the son of Adam changes more quickly than a pan of rapidly boiling water.” (Ibid., no. 226. Its isnaad is saheeh: Zilaal al-Jannah, 1/102), According to another report: “It changes more than a pot of rapidly boiling water.” (Reported by Ahmad, 6/4; Saheeh al-Jaami’, no. 5147).

Allaah is the One Who turns hearts around and controls them. ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas reported that he heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: “The hearts of the children of Adam are as one between the fingers

of the Most Merciful, and He turns them in whatever way He wills." Then he said: "O Allaah, Controller of the hearts, direct our hearts to obey You." (Reported by Muslim, no. 2654).

Allaah tells us that:

> "… Allaah comes in between a person and his heart (i.e., He prevents an evil person from deciding anything)…" [al-Anfaal 8:24 – interpretation of the meaning]
> no one will be saved on the Day of Resurrection "except him who brings to Allaah a clean heart [free from shirk and hypocrisy]." [al-Shu'ara' 26:89 – interpretation of the meaning]
> "those whose hearts are hardened" [al-Hajj 22:53 – interpretation of the meaning] are doomed
> and the promise of Paradise is for those "who feared the Most Beneficent (Allaah) in the Unseen, (i.e., in the worldly life, before seeing and meeting Him), and brought a heart turned in repentance (to Him)." [Qaaf 50:33 – interpretation of the meaning].

So the believer must check his heart, find out the nature and cause of the problem, and start treating it straight away, before it overwhelms him and destroys him. The matter is of the utmost seriousness, for Allaah has warned us against the heart that is hardened, closed, sick, blind and sealed.

There follows a discussion of the symptoms of weak faith, what causes it and how it may be treated. I ask Allaah to benefit me and my Muslim brothers through this work, and to richly reward all those who have played a part in producing this book, for He is the One Whom we ask to soften our hearts and guide us. He is our Protector, He is sufficient for us and He is the Best Disposer of affairs.

Symptoms of weak faith

There are a number of symptoms of the sickness of weak faith, including the following:

Falling into sin and committing haraam deeds : There are some sinners who commit a sin and persist in it, and some who commit many kinds of sin. When a person commits many sins, sin becomes a habit which he gets used to, and then he no longer feels that it is abhorrent. He gradually reaches a stage where he commits the sin openly, and thus becomes one of those referred to in the hadeeth: "All of my ummah will be fine except for those who commit sin openly, an example of which is a man who does something at night, and when morning comes and Allaah has concealed his sin, he says, 'O So-and-so, I did such and such yesterday.' His Lord had covered his sin all night, but he has uncovered what Allaah had concealed." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath 10/486).

Feeling that one's heart is hard and rough : A man may feel that his heart has turned to stone which nothing can penetrate or reach. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became as stones or even worse in hardness…" [al-Baqarah 2:74]. The person whose heart is hard will not be moved by reminders of death or by seeing deceased persons or funerals. He may even carry a dead person to his grave and throw earth into the grave, but when he walks between the graves it is as if he is merely walking between rocks.

Not doing acts of worship properly : His mind wanders and he fails to concentrate properly when praying, reading Qur'aan, making du'aa', etc. He does not think about what he is saying, and he recites the words as the matter of boring habit, if he does these regularly at all. If he has the habit of praying a certain du'aa' at certain times, according to the sunnah, he does not think about the meaning of what he is saying, and Allaah "does not accept the du'aa' of one whose heart is heedless of Him." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 3479; al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 594).

Laziness and carelessness in performing acts of worship : If he does them at all, they are just empty movements, devoid of any real feeling. Allaah has described the hypocrites thus (interpretation of the meaning): "… and when they stand up for prayer, they stand up with laziness…" [al-Nisa' 4:142]. This also includes

neglecting to make the most of special occasions and times for worship. This indicates that a person has no interest in earning reward, so he may delay going for Hajj although he is able to do so, or fail to go for jihaad when he has the strength to do so, or fail to attend prayers in congregation, or even Salat al-Jumu'ah. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "People will keep holding back from being in the first row (of congregational prayers), until Allaah throws them into the Fire." (Reported by Abu Dawood, no. 679; Saheeh al-Targheeb, no. 510). This kind of person does not feel any remorse or guilt if he sleeps and misses one of the obligatory prayers, or a sunnah prayer that is strongly encouraged, or a wird [regular du'aa' and dhikr]. He does not want to make it up later, and he deliberately omits doing anything that is sunnah or fard kifaayah (a duty which, if carried out by some of the people, is no longer obligatory on all, but if no-one does it, all are held accountable). So he may not attend Eid prayers (although some scholars say that they are obligatory), or offer the prayers to be said at the time of lunar and solar eclipses, or attend funerals. He does not care about reward at all, which is the opposite of the ideal described by Allaah in the Qur'aan (interpretation of the meaning): "… they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us." [al-Anbiya' 21:90]

Another example of laziness in performing acts of worship is the neglect of sunnah actions which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) performed regularly, and praying at night (qiyaam al-layl), setting out early to go to the mosque, and other naafil prayers, such as duhaa, never even occur to him, let alone the two-rak'ahs of tawbah (repentance) and istikhaarah.

Tightness in the chest, mood swings and depression, which weigh a man down and make him quick to complain about the slightest thing. He easily gets upset with the people around him, and no longer has any tolerance. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) described faith when he said, "Eemaan is patience and tolerance" (Al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, no. 554, 2/86), and he described the believer as being "one who makes friends and with whom

others feel comfortable. There is no goodness in one who does not make friends and with whom others do not feel comfortable." (Al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, no. 427).

Not being moved by the aayaat of the Qur'aan, by its promises of Paradise or its warnings of Hell, by its commands and prohibitions, or by its descriptions of the Day of Resurrection. The one who is weak in faith gets bored when he hears the Qur'aan being recited, and cannot continue reading it. Whenever he opens the mus-haf, he soon closes it again.

Not focusing on Allaah when remembering Him (dhikr) or making du'aa', so dhikr becomes difficult for him, and when he raises his hands to make du'aa', he quickly lowers them again. Allaah has described the hypocrites (interpretation of the meaning): "… and they do not remember Allaah but little." [al-Nisa' 4:142]

Not feeling angry when the limits set by Allaah are violated, because the flame of zeal has been extinguished in his heart, so he no longer takes action to stop evil, or enjoins evildoers to do good, or denounces wrongdoing. He never gets angry for the sake of Allaah. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) described this heart ravaged by weakness in the saheeh hadeeth: "The heart will be subjected to trial after trial, and there will appear a black stain on any heart that is affected, which will spread until the heart is completely black and sealed, as it were, so that it will not recognize any good deed or denounce any evil, except whatever suits its own desires." (Reported by Muslim, no. 144). Love of good and hatred of evil have disappeared from a heart like this; all things are equal to such a person, and he has no motive to enjoin good or forbid evil. He may hear of some evil that is being done on earth, and may accept it; in this case he carries the same burden of sin as one who witnesses evil and approves of it, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in the saheeh hadeeth: "If sin is committed on earth, the one who witnesses it and hates it [one time he said, 'denounces it'] will be like one who knew nothing of it. Whoever does not witness it but approves of it will be like one who witnesses it." (Reported by Abu Dawood, no. 4345; Saheeh al-Jaami', 689). This approval,

which is an action of the heart, makes him like one who witnessed the sin.

Love of fame and prominence, which may take many forms, including the following:

Desire for leadership without understanding the serious responsibility involved. This is what the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) warned us against when he said, "You will be very keen to be leaders, but you will regret it on the Day of Resurrection, for although it seems easy in the beginning, it becomes a hardship later on [literally: the breastfeeding is a luxury but weaning is miserable]." (The meaning is that at the beginning, leadership brings wealth, power and enjoyment, but later it brings the risk of being assassinated or deposed, and one will be brought to account on the Day of Resurrection). (Reported by al-Bukhaari, no. 6729). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said: "If you wish, I could tell you about leadership and what it is. Firstly, it is blame; secondly, it is regret; and thirdly, it is punishment on the Day of Resurrection – except for one who is just." (Reported by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer, 18/72; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1420). If it were the case that a man wanted to carry out duties and responsibilities, where there is no one better for the job than him, with the intention of doing his best and being sincere and just, as Yusuf (peace be upon him) did, then we could say that this is fair enough. But in most cases it is the matter of a strong desire to lead and put oneself forward although there is a better person, denying the opportunity of leadership to those who are qualified and wanting to be the only one to issue instructions and prohibitions.

Loving to sit at the head of gatherings, to monopolize the discussion, to make others listen to one's words, and to have power. The head of a gathering is the "slaughterhouse" about which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) warned us when he said, "Beware of these slaughterhouses." (Reported by al-Bayhaqi, 2/439; Saheeh al-

Jaami', 120).

Loving to have people stand up when one comes into the room, because this makes the one whose heart is diseased feel great. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever feels happy to have the slaves of Allaah stand up for him, let him occupy his house in Hellfire." (Reported by al-Bukhaari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, 977; see also Silsilah al-Saheeh, 357). Once when Mu'aawiyah went out to see Ibn al-Zubayr and Ibn 'Aamir, Ibn 'Aamir stood up whilst Ibn al-Zubayr remained sitting (according to one report: and he [Ibn al-Zubayr] was wiser and more stable in character). Mu'aawiyah said to Ibn 'Aamir, "Sit down, for I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say, 'Whoever likes to have men stand up for him, let him take his place in Hellfire.'" (Reported by Abu Dawood, no. 5229, and by al-Bukhaari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, 977; al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 357). This kind of person will get angry if the sunnah is followed and people start from the right (and not with him, when passing out refreshments, etc.); when such a person enters a gathering, he will not be happy until someone gets up and gives him his seat, even though the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade this when he said, "No man should make another get up from his place so that he can sit in it." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, al-Fath, 11/62).

Stinginess and miserliness. Allaah praised the Ansaar in His Book by saying (interpretation of the meaning): "… and [they] gave them [the muhaajiroon] preference over themselves, even though they were in need of that…" [al-Hashr 59:9]. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained that the successful are those who avoid miserliness, and that weakness of faith generates stinginess: "Stinginess and faith never exist together in the heart of the believer." (Reported by al-Nisaa'i, al-Mujtaba, 6/13; Saheeh al-Jaami', 2678). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also described the serious nature of stinginess and its consequences: "Beware of stinginess, for those who came before you were destroyed because of stinginess. It

commanded them to be miserly, so they were miserly; it commanded them to cut family ties, so they cut them; and it commanded them to be immoral, so they were immoral." (Reported by Abu Dawood, 2/324; Saheeh al-Jaami, no. 2678). When it comes to miserliness, the person whose faith is weak can hardly give anything for the sake of Allaah, even when there is an honest appeal and it is quite obvious that his brothers in Islam are suffering the impact of poverty and are stricken by disaster. There is no more eloquent statement on the matter of miserliness than the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): "Behold! You are those who are called to spend in the Cause of Allaah, yet among you are some who are niggardly. And whoever is niggardly, it is only at the expense of his own self. But Allaah is Rich (Free of all wants), and you (mankind) are poor. And if you turn away (from Islam and the obedience of Allaah), He will exchange for you some other people, and they will not be your likes." [Muhammad 47:38].

Not practising what one preaches. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Most hateful is it with Allaah that you say that which you do not do." [al-Saff 61:2-3]. No doubt this is a kind of hypocrisy, and the person whose deeds do not match his words is blameworthy before Allaah and despicable in the eyes of his fellow man. The people of Hellfire will soon discover the reality of the one who enjoins good but does not do it, and forbids evil, but does it himself.

Malicious enjoyment of the failures, losses or disasters suffered by one's brothers in Islam, when the blessings that they had enjoyed are taken away, or when the thing that made another person appear more distinguished than him is gone.

Looking at matters in black-or-white terms of whether they are sinful or not, and taking the matter of makrooh lightly. Some people, when they want to do something, do not ask about what good deeds they could do, instead they ask, "Will this be counted as a sin, or is it 'only' makrooh?" This way of thinking leads them into the trap of issues that are not clear-cut and deeds that are makrooh, and eventually ensnares them in haraam deeds. The person who thinks like this has nothing to stop him from committing makrooh or doubtful deeds so long as

they are not actually haraam. This is exactly what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was talking about what he said , "Whoever falls into doubtful matters falls into haraam, like a shepherd who grazes his flock around a place where he is not allowed – he will soon enter it…" (Reported by al-Bukhaari and Muslim; this version narrated by Muslim, no. 1599). When some people ask for a fatwa about something and are told that it is haraam, they ask, "Is it very haraam or not? How much sin is involved?" People like this have no interest in avoiding bad deeds; indeed, they are prepared to commit the first level of haraam and they take small sins lightly, with the results that they they have the guts to transgress even further and violate the limits set by Allaah. For this reason the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "I will certainly recognize people who will come on the Day of Resurrection bringing good deeds as great as the white mountain of Tuhaamah, and Allaah, may He be glorified, will make it like dust in the air." Thawbaan said, "O Messenger of Allaah, describe them to us and explain this so that we will not unwittingly be among them." He said, "They are your brothers and they look like you. They pray at night as you do, but if they had the opportunity to violate the limits set by Allaah, they would do so." (Reported by Ibn Maajah, no. 4245. He said in al-Zawaa'id: its isnaad is saheeh and its men are thiqaat. See also Saheeh al-Jaami', 5028).

So you will find such a person committing haraam deeds without any hesitation or reservation, which makes him worse than the one who does so after pausing and hesitating. Both are in danger, but the former is worse than the latter. This kind of person takes sins lightly as a result of his weakness of faith, and does not think that he has done anything wrong. For this reason, Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) described the attitude of the believer and of the hypocrite as follows: "The believer sees his sins as if he were sitting beneath a mountain which he fears will fall on him, whilst the sinner sees his sins as if it were a fly passing his nose and he says such-and-such to it" – i.e., he shoos it away with his hand. (Reported by al-Bukhaari, al-Fath, 11/102; See also Taghleeq al-Ta'leeq, 5/136, publ. by al-Maktab al-Islami).

Thinking little of good deeds, and having no interest in doing small hasanaat. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught us to pay attention to small acts of goodness. Imaam Ahmad (may Allaah have mercy on him) reported from Abu Juray al-Hujaymi who said, "I came to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said, 'O Messenger of Allaah, we are a desert people. Teach us something by which Allaah, may He be blessed and exalted, will benefit us.' He said, 'Do not look down on any act of goodness, even if it is just emptying your bucket into the vessel of one who wants to drink, or speaking to your brother with a cheerful expression.'" (Musnad Ahmad, 5/63; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1352). If someone comes wanting to drink from the well, and you lift up your bucket and empty it for him, this is a good deed; even though it appears insignificant, you should not think little of it. The same applies to greeting your brother with a cheerful expression, and cleaning dirt and garbage from the mosque, even if it is as small as a straw. This deed may be the cause of your sins being forgiven, for Allaah will appreciate good deeds of this nature and will forgive sins because of them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "A man passed a branch of a tree lying in the road and said, 'By Allaah, I want to remove this out of the way of the Muslims so that it will not hurt them,' and he was admitted to Paradise." (Reported by Muslim, no. 1914).

There is something wrong with the person who thinks little of simple acts of goodness. It is sufficient punishment for this attitude that he is denied the great advantage described by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "Whoever removes something harmful from the path of the Muslims, one hasanah will be recorded for him, and whoever has a hasanah accepted, will enter Paradise." (Reported by al-Bukhaari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, no. 593; see also al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 5/387). Mu'aadh was walking with another man, and he picked up a stone from the road. The man asked him, "What is this?" He said, "I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say, 'Whoever removes a stone from the road, one hasanah will be recorded for him, and whoever has a hasanah, will enter Paradise.'" (al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer by al-Tabaraani, 20/101; al-Silsilat al-Saheeh, 5/387).

Lack of concern about the Muslims' affairs and lack of any involvement whether it be by making du'aa', giving charity or helping them. Such a person has a cool attitude towards the oppression, suppression and disasters suffered by his Muslim brothers in other parts of the world, and is content merely with his own safety. This is the result of weak faith, because the believer is the opposite of that. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The believer's position in relation to his fellow believers is like that of the head to the body; the believer feels the pain of his fellow believers as the body reacts to the pain suffered by the head." (Musnad Ahmad, 5/340; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1137).

Breaking the ties of brotherhood between two who used to be close. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No two people are friends for the sake of Allaah or in Islam, but they will be split apart by the first sin (according to another report: they will only be split apart by the first sin) committed by either of them." (al-Bukhaari, al-Adab al-Mufrad, no. 401; Ahmad, al-Musnad, 2/68; see also al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 637). This indicates the bad effects which may impact upon and even destroy the bonds of brotherhood. This alienation which a man may feel between himself and his brother is a result of the lowering of faith caused by committing a sin, because Allaah causes him to lose his standing in the eyes of His slaves, and so he is in the miserable position of having no respect and misses out on the fellowship of the believers and the protection of Allaah, for Allaah protects those who believe.

Not feeling any responsibility to work for Islam and spread this religion, which is unlike the attitude of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), who as soon as they entered this religion felt this responsibility straight away, for example, al-Tufayl ibn 'Amr (may Allaah be pleased with him), who became Muslim and went to call his people to Islam straight away. He was only a new Muslim but he felt that he had to go back and call his people to Islam, and he went and did this, yet nowadays many people wait for a long time after they become committed to Islam before they reach the

stage of calling others to Allaah, may He be glorified.

The Companions of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), as a result of entering Islam, used to feel enmity towards the kuffaar, and they would disavow themselves of them and draw a clear line. When Thamaamah ibn Athaal (may Allaah be pleased with him), the chief of the people of al-Yamaamah, was taken prisoner, he was held in the mosque, and the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told him about Islam. Then Allaah caused the light of Islam to shine in his heart, and he became Muslim. He went for 'Umrah, and when he reached Makkah, he told the kuffaar of Quraysh, "Not one grain of wheat will reach you from al-Yamaamah except with the permission of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 8/78). This declaration of opposition to the kuffaar, imposition of economic sanctions and offer of all resources at his disposal to serve the cause of da'wah all took place immediately, because strong faith demands action.

Fear and panic when disaster strikes or problems arise. So you will see such a person shaking and losing his equilibrium, with no focus, staring wild-eyed and having no idea what to do when faced with calamity. He is ruled by his fears and can see no way out; he cannot face reality with a strong and steady heart. All of this is the result of weak faith, for if his faith was strong he would be steadfast and he would face the worst disasters with calmness and strength.

Excessive arguing and disputing. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in a saheeh hadeeth: "No people will go astray after having being guided except that they become argumentative." (Reported by Ahmad in al-Musnad, 5/252; Saheeh al-Jaami', 5633). Arguing with no proof and for no good reason leads one far away from the Straight Path, and most of people's futile arguments nowadays are conducted without knowledge or guidance or (reference to) a Book giving light (i.e., the Qur'aan). We have sufficient motive to avoid futile arguments in the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "I guarantee a house in the outskirts of Paradise to the one

who forsakes argument even when he is in the right." (Reported by Abu Dawood, 5/150; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1464).

Attachment to this world and rejoicing in it. A person may be so attached to this world that he feels pain if he misses out on some share of it, such as money, power, authority, or housing. He feels that he is unfairly treated because he has not got what others have. He feels more stress when he sees a brother in Islam who has something of this world that he does not have, so he envies him (hasad) and wishes that he will lose that blessing. This goes against eemaan, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Eeman and hasad do not exist together in the heart of the true slave." (Reported by Abu Dawood, 5/150; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1464).

He talks and thinks in a purely rational manner, devoid of the characteristics of faith. There is hardly any trace of a reference to the Qur'aan and Sunnah, or the words of the salaf (the early generations of Islam – may Allaah have mercy on them), in the way such a person speaks.

Going to extremes in the way one cares for oneself, in food, drink, clothing, housing and means of transportation. So you see these people showing excessive interest in luxuries, trying to be sophisticated, buying only the finest clothes, spending extravagant amounts on their choice of housing and spending too much time and money on such unnecessary adornments whilst their Muslim brothers are in the greatest need of that money. This carries on until they sink into the soft life of luxury which is forbidden, as is reported in the hadeeth of Mu'aadh ibn Jabal (may Allaah be pleased with him): when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent him to Yemen, he advised him: "Beware of luxury, for the slaves of Allaah do not live a life of luxury." (Reported by Abu Na'eem in al-Hilyah, 5/155; Silsilat al-Saheehah, 353. A similar version was also reported by Ahmad in al-Musnad, 5/243).

Causes of weak faith

There are many causes of weak faith, some of which are the same as the symptoms, such as committing sin or being preoccupied with this world. There follows a list of some additional causes:

Keeping away from a faith-filled environment for too long. This causes weak faith in a person. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Has not the time come for the hearts of those who believe to be affected by Allaah's Reminder (this Qur'aan), and that which has been revealed of the truth, lest they become as those who received the Scripture before (i.e., Jews and Christians), and the term was prolonged for them and so their hearts were hardened? And many of them were faasiqoon (rebellious, disobedient to Allaah)." [al-Hadeed 57:16]. This aayah indicates that spending too much time away from a faith-filled environment leads to weakness of faith in the heart. For example, a person who stays away from his brothers in Islam for a long period, because of travel or work, etc., is going to miss the atmosphere of faith in which he was living and from which his heart gained its strength. The believer is weak on his own but strong with his brothers. Al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "Our brothers are dearer to us than our families, for our families remind us of this world, but our brothers remind us of the Hereafter." If this absence goes on for too long, it creates alienation in the heart, which eventually changes into disdain for that faith-filled atmosphere, which in turn hardens the heart and fills it with darkness, extinguishing the light of eemaan. This explains the complete change of heart on the part of some who travel to other lands on vacation or who relocate for purposes of work or study.

Keeping away from the good example of righteous leaders. The person who learns from a righteous man gains beneficial knowledge, does a righteous deed and strengthens his eemaan at the same time; (that leader) takes care of him and passes on to him the knowledge, good morals and virtues that he has. If he keeps away from that teacher for some time, he begins to feel hardness in his heart. For this reason when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) died and was buried, his Sahaabah said, "We looked at our hearts and felt

that there had been a deep change." They felt alienated and lost because their teacher and example (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had died. According to some reports, they were described as being "like sheep on a rainy winter's night." But the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) left behind great leaders, giants among men, all of whom were qualified to take up the reins of leadership, and some of them became examples to the others. But nowadays the Muslims are in desperate need of examples close at hand to them.
Failing to seek knowledge and to be acquainted with the books of the salaf (early generation) and religious books which will uplift and revive the heart. There are many kinds of books which the reader will feel stir up faith in his heart and motivate him to fulfil his spiritual potential, foremost among which is the Book of Allaah, may He be exalted, and the books of hadeeth, followed by the books of scholars who are good at writing about issues that soften the heart and who explain 'aqeedah (correct belief) in a manner that moves the soul and uplifts the heart, such as Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Rajab and others. By ignoring these books and reading only intellectual works, or books of fiqh rulings which do not quote their daleel (evidence), or books of grammar rules and usool (bases of 'aqeedah), is something that may have the effect of hardening the heart. This is not a criticism of those books per se, it is only a warning to the person who keeps away from books of Tafseer and hadeeth and hardly ever reads them, even though they are the books that bring one closer to Allaah. For example, when one reads al-Saheehayn (al-Bukhaari and Muslim), you feel the atmosphere of the age of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and the Sahaabah, and you feel the breeze of eemaan by sharing the events that happened in their time.

The people of hadeeth are the people of the Messenger; even if they did not have the chance to be with him, they are with his words.

This problem – keeping away from religious books – clearly has an effect on those who study disciplines which have no connection with Islam, such as philosophy, psychology, social science, etc., disciplines which have been developed far away from Islamic teachings. The same applies to those who love

to read fiction and love stories, or who follow worthless news stories in newspapers, magazines and so on.

Living in an environment that is filled with sin, so you see one boasting about his latest misdemeanour, another humming popular songs to himself, a third smoking, a fourth reading a pornographic magazine, a fifth cursing and swearing, and so on. As for talk about who said what to whom, gossip, backbiting and discussion about the latest football match, there is no end to it.

Some environments remind one only of this world, as is the case in most gatherings and work-places nowadays. Discussions about business, work, money, investments, work-related problems, raises, promotions, assignments and so on take precedence in the minds and speech of most people nowadays.

As for what goes on in the home – there is a lot we can say about the disasters and evil deeds that cause the Muslim shame and hurt him deeply. Muslim homes are filled with shameless songs, vile movies, forbidden mixing of the sexes and so on. No doubt in such an environment hearts are stricken with the disease of hardness.

Preoccupation with this world, so that the heart is enslaved by it. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "He is doomed, the slave of the dinar and the slave of the dirham" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, no. 2730), and, "All that is sufficient for any one of you in this world is the supply of the traveller" (reported by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer, 4/78; Saheeh al-Jaami', 2384) – meaning a little of something that will help him to reach his destination. This phenomenon (preoccupation with this world) is very apparent in our own times, when material greed and the desire to acquire more worthless worldly goods have become widespread, and people are now running after trade, manufacturing and shares. This confirms what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Allaah, may He be glorified, says: 'We have sent down wealth for the establishment of prayer and the payment of zakaat, but if the son of Adam has one valley, he will wish that he had a second, and if he had

two valleys, he would wish that he had a third. The stomach of the son of Adam will be filled only with dust (i.e., he is never satisfied) then Allaah will accept the repentance of the one who repents." (Reported by Ahmad, 5/219; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1781).

Being preoccupied with one's wealth, wife and children. Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings): "And know that your possessions and children are but a trial and that surely with Allaah is a mighty reward." [al-Anfaal 8:28] and, "Beautified for men is the love of things they covet: women, children, much of gold and silver (wealth), branded beautiful horses, cattle and well-tilled land. This is the pleasure of the present world's life, but Allaah has the excellent return (Paradise)." [Aal 'Imraan 3:14]. The meaning of these aayat is that if the love of these things, especially women and children, is given precedence over obedience to Allaah and His Messenger, then it is regarded as being bad, but if the love of these things is within the bounds of sharee'ah, it helps a man to obey Allaah and in this case it is praiseworthy. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "In this world, women and good scents have been made dear to me, but dearest of all to me is prayer." (Reported by Ahmad, 3/128; Saheeh al-Jaami', 3124). Many men follow their wives in doing haraam deeds, and allow their children to distract them from worshipping Allaah. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Children are the cause of grief, cowardice, ignorance and miserliness." (Reported by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer, 24/241; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1990). When he said that they are the cause of miserliness, he meant that if a man wants to spend for the sake of Allaah, the Shaytaan reminds him of his children, so he thinks, "My children deserve the money, I will leave it for them when I die, so he is miserly in the sense that he refrains from spending it for the sake of Allaah. When he said that children are the cause of cowardliness, he meant that when a man wants to fight in jihaad for the sake of Allaah, the Shaytaan comes to him and says, "You will be killed and will die, and your children will become orphans, lost and alone," so he stays home and does not go out for jihaad. When he said that children are the cause of ignorance, he meant that they distract a father from seeking knowledge and trying to acquire learning by attending gatherings and reading

books. When he said that children are the cause of grief, he meant that when a child gets sick, the parent feels grief; if the child asks for something that the father cannot provide, this grieves the father; and if the child grows up and rebels against his father, this is a cause of ongoing grief and distress.

This is not to say that one should forego marrying and having children; what is meant is that one should beware of becoming preoccupied with them and letting that lead one to commit haraam deeds.

Concerning the temptation of wealth, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Every nation has its fitnah (trial or temptation), and the fitnah of my ummah is wealth." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, 2336; Saheeh al-Jaami', 2148). Eagerness to acquire wealth is more damaging to a person's religion than the wolf who attacks the sheepfold. This is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) meant when he said: "Two hungry wolves sent against the sheep do not do more damage to them than a man's eagerness for wealth and standing does to his religion." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 2376; Saheeh al-Jaami', 5620). For this reason the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) urged Muslims to take just what is sufficient, without hoping for more, which could distract him from remembering Allaah. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "All that you need of wealth is a servant and a means of transportation to go out for the sake of Allaah." (Reported by Ahmad, 5/290; Saheeh al-Jaami', 2386). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) issued a warning to those who want to accumulate wealth, except for those who give in charity: "Woe to those who want to accumulate wealth, except for the one who says with his wealth, 'Here! Here! Here!' (i.e., giving it away) to one on his right, one on his left, one in front of him and one behind him," (reported by Ibn Maajah, no. 4129; Saheeh al-Jaami', 7137) – meaning all forms of charity.

Hoping for a long life. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "Leave them to eat and enjoy, and let them be preoccupied with (false) hope. They will come to know!" [al-Hijr 15:3]. 'Ali (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "What I fear

for you is following your desires and hoping for a long life, for following one's desires makes a man ignore the truth, and hoping for a long life makes him forget the Hereafter. (Fath al-Baari, 11/236). Another report says: "Four things are causes of doom: dry eyes (i.e., never weeping), a hard heart, hope for a long life and eagerness for this world." Hoping for a long life generates laziness in worship, procrastination, desire for the things of this world, neglect of the Hereafter and hardness of heart, because softness of heart and clarity of vision can only be achieved by remembering death, the grave, reward and punishment, and the horrors of the Day of Judgement, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "… and the term was prolonged for them and their hearts were hardened…" [al-Hadeed 57:16]. It was said: "Whoever does not hope for a long life will have less worries and his heart will be filled with light, because he calls death to mind and strives to obey Allaah…" (Fath al-Baari, 11/237)

Another cause of weak faith and hard-heartedness is eating too much, sleeping too much, staying up too late, talking too much and mixing with people too much. Eating too much makes the brain slow and the body heavy, which prevents a person from worshipping Allaah and makes it easy for Shaytaan to tempt him, as it was said: "Whoever eats too much, drinks too much and sleeps too much, loses a great reward." Talking too much hardens the heart, and mixing too much with people stops a person from having time to be alone and reflect on his own state. Laughing too much drains life from the heart. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in a saheeh hadeeth: "Do not laugh too much, for excessive laughter deadens the heart." (Reported by Ibn Maajah, 4193; see also Saheeh al-Jaami'). Time that is not filled with worship of Allaah also leads to hard-heartedness, as a person pays heed to neither the rebukes of the Qur'aan nor the advice of faith.

The causes of weak faith are many indeed, and it is impossible to list them all, but what we have listed above will give the reader an impression of others which we have not mentioned here. The wise person understands this innately. We ask Allaah to purify our hearts and protect us from the evil of our own selves.

Curing weak faith

Al-Haakim reported in al-Mustadrak, and al-Tabaraani reported in al-Mu'jam, that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Faith wears out in the heart of any one of you just as clothes wear out, so ask Allaah to renew the faith in your hearts." (Reported by al-Haakim in al-Mustadrak, 1/4; see also al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1585. Al-Haythami said in Majma' al-Zawaa'id, 1/52, "It was reported by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer and its isnaad is saheeh.") What he meant is that faith wears out in the heart just as clothes wear out and become old. The heart of the believer is sometimes overwhelmed by clouds of sin, and so it goes dark. This is the picture drawn for us by the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the saheeh hadeeth: "There is no heart that is not covered by a cloud like the cloud covering the moon when it is shining, and so it suddenly goes dark, but when it (the cloud) goes away, it shines again." (Reported by Abu Na'eem in al-Hilyah, 2/196; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 2268). Sometimes the moon is covered by clouds, which conceal its light, but after a little while they go away, and the light of the moon comes back to light up the sky. In the same way, the heart of the believer is sometimes covered with dark clouds of sin, so its light is veiled, and the person finds himself lost in darkness, but when he strives to increase his eemaan and seeks the help of Allaah, that cloud goes away, and the light comes back to shine in his heart as before.

One of the most important principles which must be understood in order to treat the problem of weak faith is that faith increases and decreases, or waxes and wanes. This is one of the basic principles of the 'aqeedah of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah, who say that faith is something to be spoken in words, to be believed in in the heart, and to be put into action. Faith increases with obedience and decreases with disobedience. There is evidence for this in the Qur'aan and Sunnah, for example, Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings): "… that they may grow more in Faith along with their (present) Faith…" [al-Fath 48:4] and "… Which of you has had his faith increased by it? …" [al-Tawbah 9:124]. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it by his hand (by action), and if he cannot, then by his tongue (by speaking out), and if he cannot, then by his heart (by feeling that it is wrong), and that is the weakest of faith." (Al-Bukhaari, Fath, 1/51).

The effects of obedience and sin, which increase and decrease faith respectively, are well known from observation and experience. If a person goes out walking in the market-place, where he looks at uncovered women wearing make-up, and hears the shouting and idle talk of the people, then he goes to the graveyard and stops to think and let his heart soften, he will see the difference between the two environments and how quickly his heart changes.

Another factor in this discussion is the words of one of the salaf: "One of the signs of proper understanding is when a slave takes care of his eemaan, and pays attention to what decreases it, and knows when it increases and when it decreases, and recognizes the temptation of Shaytaan when he comes to him." (Sharh Nooniyah Ibn al-Qayyim by Ibn 'Eesa, 2/140).

It is important to know that if a decrease in faith leads to one neglecting one's duties or doing haraam deeds, this slackening is very serious and one must repent to Allaah and start to do something about it at once. If it does not lead to neglect of duties and doing haraam deeds, but just makes a person fall short in doing mustahabb (recommended) deeds, for example, then a person still needs to know how to sort himself out and correct himself until he returns to the proper level of energy and strength in worship. This is what we learn from the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "Every deed has energy and strength, and then this energy and strength is followed by a slackening, so who's slackening is in accordance to my Sunnah he will be fine, and who's slackening is to other than that [i.e., doing unlawful or forebidden deeds] he will be doomed." (Reported by Ahmad, 2/210; Saheeh al-Targheeb, no. 55).

Before we discuss how to treat the problem of weak faith, there is something we should note: many of those who feel that their hearts are hard look for an external solution, hoping that they can rely on others, even though it is within their reach – if they want – to take care of themselves by themselves. This is how it should be done, because eemaan is the relationship between the slave and his Lord. Below, we will discuss a number of ways prescribed by Islam by means of which the Muslim can deal with his weakness of faith and hardness of heart, after he puts his trust in Allaah and resigns himself to the fact that he faces a struggle to achieve his goal:

Pondering the meanings of the Qur'aan, which Allaah has revealed to explain everything and as a Light by which He guides whomever He wills of His slaves. There is no doubt that it contains a powerful and effective cure. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "And We send down from the Qur'aan that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe…" [al-Isra' 17:82]. The method of treatment is to think and ponder its meanings.

The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to ponder the meanings of the Book of Allaah and recite it when he stood in prayer at night (qiyaam al-layl). On one occasion, he stood in prayer at night and recited one single aayah from the Book of Allaah whilst he was praying, and he did not go any further than that (one aayah) until morning. The aayah in question was (interpretation of the meaning): "If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise." [al-Maa'idah 5:118]. (Reported by Ahmad, 4/149; see also Sifat al-Salaah by al-Albaani, p. 102).

He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to ponder the meaning of the Qur'aan, to the greatest extent. Ibn Hibbaan reported in his Saheeh with a jayyid isnaad from 'Ataarah, who said: "'Ubayd-Allaah ibn 'Umayr and I entered upon 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) and 'Ubayd-Allaah ibn 'Umayr said: 'Tell us of the most wonderful thing you saw on the part of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).' She wept and said, 'He got up one night (to pray) and said, "O 'Aa'ishah, leave me to worship my Lord." I said, "By Allaah, I love to be near you, and I love what makes you happy." He got up, purified himself and stood up to pray, and he kept weeping until his lap got wet, then he wept and kept weeping until the ground got wet. Bilaal came to call the adhaan for him, and when he saw him weeping, he said, "O Messenger of Allaah, are you weeping when Allaah has forgiven all of your sins, past and future?" He said, "Should I not be a thankful slave? This night some aayaat have been revealed to me, woe to the one who reads them and does not think (about their meaning). Among them is (interpretation of the meaning): Verily! In the

creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding, those who remember Allaah (always, and in prayers) standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth…" [Aal 'Imraan 3:190-191].""" (Al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1/106). This indicates that it is obligatory to ponder the meaning of these aayaat.

The Qur'aan speaks of Tawheed, and contains promises of reward, threats of punishment, rules and regulations, reports, stories, etiquette and good morals, and its effects on the heart are various. Some soorahs fill the heart with fear more than others, as is indicated by the hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "(Soorat) Hood and its sisters made me grey before my time." (al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 2/679). According to another report: "Hood and al-Waaqi'ah and al-Mursalaat and 'amma yatasaa'aloon and Idha'l-shamsu kuwwirat" (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, 3297; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, no. 955). The Prophet's hair turned grey because of what these soorahs contain of the realities of faith and great responsibilities, which filled his heart and had a visible effect on his hair and body. "So stand (ask Allaah to make) you firm and straight (on the religion of Islamic Monotheism) as you are commanded and those (your companions) who turn in repentance (unto Allaah) with you…" [Hood 11:112 – interpretation of the meaning].

The Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) recited the Qur'aan and pondered its meaning and were moved by it. Abu Bakr (may Allaah be pleased with him) was a gentle, soft-hearted man, and when he led the people in prayer and recited the words of Allaah, he could not stop himself from weeping. 'Umar became ill after reciting the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): "Verily, the Torment of your Lord will surely come to pass, - there is none that can avert it" [al-Toor 52:7-8]. (This report and its isnaad are in Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 7/406). His sobs could be heard from the back of the congregation when he recited Allaah's words about Ya'qoob (peace be upon him) (interpretation of the meaning): "He said, 'I only complain of my grief and my sorrow to Allaah…'" [Yoosuf 12:86]. (Manaaqib 'Umar by Ibn al-

Jawzi, 167). 'Uthmaan (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "If our hearts were pure and clean, we would never have enough of the Word of Allaah." He was killed unjustly as a martyr and his blood fell on his mus-haf – the reports from the Sahaabah concerning this are many. Ayyoob said: "I heard Sa'eed (ibn Jubayr) reciting this aayah twenty-odd times: "And be afraid of the Day when you shall be brought back to Allaah…" [al-Baqarah 2:281 – interpretation of the meaning]. (Siyar A'laam al-Nubala', 4/324). This was the last aayah to be revealed of the Qur'aan, and the ending of it is (interpretation of the meaning): "… Then every person shall be paid what he earned, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly." [al-Baqarah 2:281]. Ibraaheem ibn Bashshaar said: "The aayah which 'Ali ibn Fudayl was reading when he died was (interpretation of the meaning): 'If you could but see when they will be held over the (Hell) Fire! They will say: "Would that we were but sent back (to the world)!…"' [al-An'aam 6:27]. When he reached that point, he died, and I was one of those who prayed for him [at his funeral], may Allaah have mercy on him." (Siyar A'laam al-Nubala', 4/446). Even when they prostrated as required when reading Qur'aan (sajadaat al-tilaawah – prostrations required when reciting certain aayaat of the Qur'aan), they reacted in different ways. One of them was the man – may Allaah have mercy on him – who, when he read the aayah (interpretation of the meaning), "And they fall down on their faces weeping and it adds to their humility" [al-Isra' 17:109], prostrated as required, then he rebuked himself by saying: "This is the prostration, but where is the weeping?"

Among the features of the Qur'aan which are most deserving of contemplation are the examples and parables which Allaah sets forth and urges us to ponder and think about. He tells us (interpretation of the meanings): " … Allaah sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember" [Ibraaheem 14:25] and "… Such are the parables which We put forward to mankind that they may reflect." [al-Hashr 59:21].

One of the salaf once read one of these parables of Allaah and could not grasp the meaning, so he began to weep. He was asked, "What makes you weep?" He said: "Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): 'And these similitudes We put

forward for mankind, but none will understand them except those who have knowledge (of Allaah and His Signs, etc.)' [al-'Ankaboot 29:43], and I do not understand the parable. I am not one who has knowledge, and I am weeping for all the time I have wasted and not gained knowledge."

Allaah sets forth many parables for us in the Qur'aan, such as the following (interpretation of the meanings): the one who kindled a fire [al-Baqarah 2:17], the one who shouts to the (flock of sheep) that hears nothing [al-Baqarah 2:171], the likeness of a grain (of corn) that grows seven ears [al-Baqarah 2:261], the dog who lolls his tongue out [al-A'raaf 7:176], the donkey who carries huge burdens of books (but learns nothing from them) [al-Jumu'ah 62:5], the fly (which none but Allaah can create, even if they join together for that purpose) [al-Hajj 22:73], the spider (which builds a house for itself, but it is the frailest of houses) [al-'Ankaboot 29:41], the blind and the deaf and the seer and the hearer [Hood 11:24], the ashes on which the wind blows furiously on a stormy day [Ibraaheem 14:18], the goodly tree [Ibraaheem 14:24], the evil tree [Ibraaheem 14:26], the water which is sent down from the sky [al-An'aam 6:99], the niche within which is a lamp [al-Noor 24:35], the slave under the possession of another who has no power of any sort [al-Nahl 16:75], the (slave) man belonging to many partners [al-Zumar 39:29], and others. The point here is that we should refer to these aayat and pay special attention to them, pondering their meanings.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) summed up what the Muslim has to do to remedy the hardness of his heart with the Qur'aan. He said: "There are two main things you have to do. The first is to move your heart from dwelling on the things of this world and move it to dwell on the Hereafter, then focus all your heart on the Qur'aan and ponder its meanings and why it was revealed. Try to understand something from every aayah and apply it to the disease of your heart. These aayaat were revealed (to treat) the disease of the heart, so you will be healed, by the permission of Allaah."

Trying to feel an awareness of the might of Allaah, learning His names and

attributes, pondering their meanings, trying to understand them and to establish these feelings in the heart so that they may have an effect on one's actions. The heart is the controller of the faculties, which are like soldiers and followers; if it is sound, they will be sound, and if it is corrupt, they will be corrupt.

The texts of the Qur'aan and Sunnah which speak of the greatness and might of Allaah are many. When the Muslim reads them, he is shaken and becomes humble before the Most High, the Most Great, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and his fear and submission to the Lord of the first and the last increases. Many of His names and attributes are mentioned in the Qur'aan. He is the Most Great (al-'Azeem), the Watcher over His creatures (al-Muhaymin), the Compeller (al-Jabbaar), the Majestic (al-Mutakabbir), the Most Strong (al-Qawi), the Subduer (al-Qahhaar), the Great (al-Kabeer), the Most Exalted (al-Muta'aal). He is the Living Who does not die, although jinn and men die. He is the One Who has irresistable power over His slaves. The thunder glorifies and praises Him, and so do the angels because of His awe. He is All-Mighty, All-Able of retribution. He is the Self-Sustaining who does not sleep. He has full knowledge of all things. He knows the fraud of the eyes, and all that the breasts conceal. He has described His vast knowledge in the following terms (interpretation of the meaning): "And with Him are the keys of the ghayb (all that is hidden), none knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is in (or on) the earth and in the sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth nor anything fresh or dry but is written in a Clear Record." [al-An'aam 6:59]. One of the aspects of His greatness about which He has told us is (interpretation of the meaning): "… And on the Day of Resurrection the whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand…" [al-Zumar 39:67]. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Allaah will seize the earth on the Day of Resurrection and will roll up the heavens in His right hand, then He will say, 'I am the King, where are the kings of the earth?" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 6947). The heart trembles when one reads the story of Moosa and how he said (interpretation of the meaning):" 'O my Lord! Show me (Yourself), that I may look upon You.' Allaah said, 'You cannot see Me, but look upon the mountain, if it stands still in its place, then you

shall see Me.' So when his Lord appeared to the mountain, He made it collapse to dust, and Moosa fell down unconscious…" [al-A'raaf 7:143]. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained this aayah, he said, "Like this," and gestured with his thumb on the highest knuckle of his little finger, then he said, "and the mountain trembled and collapsed." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 3074; Ahmad, 3/125, 209. Ibn Katheer quoted its isnaads in his Tafseer, 3/466. Ibn al-Qayyim said: Its isnaad is saheeh according to the conditions of Muslim. Al-Albaani quoted it and classed it as saheeh in Takhreej al-Sunnah by Ibn Abi 'Aasim, hadeeth 480). Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted, has "a veil of light, and if He lifted it, the glory of His countenance would burn all of His creation as far as he could see." (Reported by Muslim, no. 197). Another aspect of Allaah's might was described by His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "When Allaah settles a matter in heaven, the angels beat their wings in humility and submission to His words, (with a sound) like a chain (beating) on a rock. When they settle down, they say, 'What did your Lord say?' They say, 'What He says is the Truth, and He is the Most High, the Most Great.'" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 7043). There are many such texts, which indicate that feeling the greatness of Allaah by pondering the meaning of these texts and others is one of the best ways of dealing with the problem of weak faith. Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) described the greatness of Allaah in the most beautiful way: "He is controlling the affairs of all the kingdoms. He commands and prohibits, creates and gives provision, and gives death and gives life. He raises and lowers people's status, alternates night and day, gives days (good and not so good) to men by turns, and causes nations to rise and fall, so that one nation vanishes and another emerges. His command and decree are carried out throughout the heavens and on earth, above it and below it, in the oceans and in the air. He has knowledge of all things and knows the number of all things. He hears all voices, and does not mistake one for another; He hears them all, in all the different languages and with all their varied requests and pleas. No voice distracts Him from hearing another, He does not confuse their requests, and He never tires of hearing the pleas of those in need. He sees all that is visible, even the walk of a black ant across a solid rock in the darkest night. The unseen is visible to Him, and secrets are known to Him… 'Whosoever

is in the heavens and on earth begs of Him (its needs from Him). Every day He has a matter to bring forth (such as giving honour to some, disgrace to some, life to some, death to some, etc.)!' [al-Rahmaan 55:29 – interpretation of the meaning]. He forgives sins, eases worries, relieves distress, helps the defeated person back on his feet, makes the poor rich, guides the one who is astray and confused, fulfils the needs of the desperate, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, conceals faults, and calms fears. He raises the status of some and lowers the status of others… Even if all the inhabitants of heaven and earth, the first and the last of them, mankind and jinn alike, were to be as pious as the most pious among them, this would not increase His sovereignty in the slightest; if they all, the first and the last of them, mankind and jinn alike, were to be as rebellious as the most rebellious among them, this would not decrease His sovereignty in the slightest. If everything in heaven and on earth, the first and the last of them, mankind and jinn, living and dead, animate and inanimate, were to stand in one place and ask of Him, and He were to give them everything that they asked for, this would not decrease what He has by even an atom's weight… He is the First, before Whom there is nothing, and the Last, after Whom there is nothing, may He be blessed and exalted. He is the Most deserving of being remembered, the Most deserving of being worshipped, the Most deserving of being thanked. He is the Most Compassionate of kings, the Most Generous of those who are asked… He is the King Who has no partner or associate, the One who has no rival, the Self-Sufficient Master, Who has no son, the Most High, and there is none like unto Him. "Everything will perish save His face" [al-Qasas 28:88 – interpretation of the meaning], and everything will vanish except His sovereignty… He will not be obeyed except by His permission, and He will not be disobeyed except with His knowledge. He is obeyed, so He shows His appreciation, and He is disobeyed, so he forgives. Every punishment on His part is justice, and every blessing from Him is a favour. He is the closest of witnesses and the nearest of protectors. He seizes people by their forelocks, records their deeds and decrees the appointed time for all things. Hearts conceal nothing from Him, for secrets are known to Him. His gift is a word and His punishment is a word: 'Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, "Be!" – and it is.' [Yaa-Seen 36:82 – interpretation of the meaning]." (Adapted from al-Waabil al-

Sayib, p. 125)

Seeking Islamic knowledge, which is knowledge that leads one to fear Allaah and which increases one's faith in Him, may He be glorified. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "… It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allaah…" [Faatir 35:28]. Those who have knowledge and those who do not are not equal in faith. How can one who knows the details of sharee'ah, the meaning and implications of the Shahaadatayn, the things that will happen after death – such as the torment of the grave, the horrors of the final gathering, the stages of the Day of Resurrection, the delights of Paradise and the punishments of Hell, the wisdom of sharee'ah in prescribing halaal and haraam, the details of the Prophet's seerah, and other kinds of knowledge… How can one who knows all this be equal in faith with one who is ignorant of the religion and its rulings and what Islam says about matters of the Unseen. All the latter knows about his religion is mere imitation, and the little knowledge he has is of poor quality. "…Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know? …" [al-Zumar 39:9 – interpretation of the meaning].

Regular attendance at gatherings of dhikr (remembrance of Allaah). This leads to an increase in faith for a number of reasons, such as the mentioning of Allaah, the descent of mercy and tranquillity, the angels surrounding the people present, and Allaah mentioning them to the chiefs (angels) on high, showing His pride in them to the angels and forgiving their sins. This was mentioned in saheeh ahaadeeth, for example, when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No people sit together remembering Allaah, but the angels surround them, mercy envelops them, tranquillity descends upon them, and Allaah mentions them to those who are in His presence." (Saheeh Muslim, no. 2700). Sahl ibn al-Hanzaliyyah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'No people gather together to remember (Allaah) and then disperse, but it will be said to them: "Get up, you are forgiven."'" (Saheeh al-Jaami', 5507). Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "When he spoke of remembering Allaah (dhikr), he meant doing it regularly and persistently, by doing acts that are

obligatory or encouraged, such as reciting Qur'aan, reading hadeeth, and studying with other people." (Fath al-Baari, 11/209). Another indication that gatherings of dhikr increase one's eemaan is the report narrated by Imaam Muslim in his Saheeh from Hanzalah al-Usaydi, who said: "I met Abu Bakr, and he asked me, 'How are you, O Hanzalah?' I said, 'Hanzalah has become a munaafiq (hypocrite).' He said, 'Subhaan-Allaah! What are you saying?' I said, 'We sit with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and he tells us about Hell and Paradise until it is as if we can see them, then when we leave the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), we get involved with our wives and children and earning a living, and we forget a lot.' Abu Bakr said, 'I feel the same way.' So Abu Bakr and I went to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and I said, 'Hanzalah has become a hypocrite, O Messenger of Allaah.' The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: 'Why is that?' I said, 'O Messenger of Allaah, we sit with you and you tell us about Hell and Paradise until it is as if we can see them, then when we leave you, we get involved with our wives and children and earning a living, and we forget a lot.' The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him said, 'By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if you continued to be as you are when you are with me, and to make dhikr, the angels would shake your hands in your beds and on the road. But, O Hanzalah, there is a time for this and a time for that' – and he said this three times." (Saheeh Muslim, no. 2750).

The Sahaabah, may Allaah be pleased with them, were keen to sit toegther for the purpose of dhikr, which they used to call eemaan (faith or belief). Mu'aadh (may Allaah be pleased with him) said to a man: "Let us sit and believe for a while." (Its isnaad is saheeh; Arba' Masaa'il fi'l-Eemaan, revised by al-Albaani, p. 72).

Doing a lot of righteous deeds and filling one's time with them. This is one of the best ways of dealing with weak faith, and is clearly very effective in strengthening faith. Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq (may Allaah be pleased with him) set the best example of this, when the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be

upon him) asked his Sahaabah: "Who among you got up fasting this morning?" Abu Bakr said, "I did." He asked, "Who among you has attended a funeral today?" Abu Bakr said, "I have." He asked, "Who among you has fed a needy person today?" Abu Bakr said, "I have." He asked, "Who among you has visited a sick person today?" Abu Bakr said, "I have." The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "No man does all of that but he will enter Paradise." (Reported by Muslim, Kitaab Fadaa'il al-Sahaabah, Baab 1, Hadeeth 12).

This story demonstrates that Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq (may Allaah be pleased with him) was keen to make the most of every opportunity and to do a variety of acts of worship. Because this was an unexpected question on the part of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), this indicates that Abu Bakr's days were filled with acts of obedience and worship. The salaf (may Allaah have mercy on them) reached the highest levels in their efforts to do righteous deeds and fill their time in this manner. An example of this is what was said about a group of the salaf among whom was Hammaad ibn Salamah. Imaam 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Mahdi said: "If it were said to Hammaad ibn Salamah, 'You will die tomorrow,' he would not be able to do more good deeds (than he was already doing)." (Siyar A'laam al-Nubala', 7/447).

The Muslim should pay attention to the following when doing good deeds:
He should hasten to do good deeds, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings): "And march forth in the way (which leads to) forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth…" [Aal 'Imraan 3:133] and "Race one with another in hastening towards Forgiveness from your Lord (Allaah), and towards Paradise, the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth…" [al-Hadeed 57:21]. The meaning of these aayaat motived the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and stirred them to action. Imaam Muslim (may Allaah have mercy on him) reported in his Saheeh from Anas ibn Maalik that at the Battle of Badr, when the mushrikeen approached, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "Get up to Paradise the width of the heavens and the earth!" 'Umayr

ibn al-Himaam al-Ansaari said, "O Messenger of Allaah, Paradise the width of the heavens and the earth?" He said, "Yes." He said, "That's great!" The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "What makes you say, 'That's great!'?" He said, "Nothing, by Allaah, O Messenger of Allaah, except that I hope I will be one of its people." He said, "You will be one of its people." He took some dates out of his pocket and started to eat them, then he said, "If I live to finish eating these dates it will be too long." He threw aside the dates then fought them until he was killed. (Saheeh Muslim, 1901). Long before that, Moosa had hastened to meet his Lord, and said, "…I hastened to You, O my Lord, that You might be pleased." [Ta-Ha 20:84 – interpretation of the meaning]. Allaah praised Zakariyah and his wife by saying (interpretation of the meaning): "…Verily, they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us." [al-Anbiya' 21:90]. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Deliberation in all things," but according to another report, he added, "except in deeds that pertain to the Hereafter [i.e., good deeds]." (Reported by Abu Dawood in his Sunan, 5/175; Saheeh al-Jaami', 3009).

Continuing to do good deeds, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, transmitting the words of his Lord in a hadeeth qudsi: "… 'My slave keeps drawing nearer to me with naafil (supererogatory) deeds until I love him.'" (Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 6137). The phrase maa yazaalu ("keeps [drawing near]") gives the impression of continuity. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Continue doing Hajj and 'Umrah." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 810; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1200). This is an important principle when it comes to strengthening one's eemaan and not neglecting oneself to the point of stagnation. A small deed that is continuous is better than a big deed that is not done regularly. Continuity in righteous deeds strengthens eemaan. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was asked: "Which deed is most beloved to Allaah?" He said, "The one that is continuous, even if it is little." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 11/194). When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did something, he kept it up." (Reported by Muslim, Kitaab Salaat al-Musaafir, Baab 18, Hadeeth 141).

Striving one's utmost to do good deeds. Dealing with a hard heart should not be the matter of a temporary solution, where eemaan strengthens for a period of time then becomes weak again; rather, it should be an ongoing effort, which can only be achieved by striving one's utmost in worship. Allaah has mentioned the efforts of His slaves in their worship in several places in the Qur'aan, such as (interpretation of the meanings): "Only those believe in Our aayaat (signs, etc.) who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate, and glorify the Praises of their Lord, and they are not proud. Their sides forsake their beds, to invoke their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend (charity, in Allaah's Cause) out of what We have bestowed on them." [al-Sajdah 32:15-16] and: "They used to sleep but little by night [invoking their Lord and praying, with fear and hope]. And in the hours before dawn, they were (found) asking (Allaah) for forgiveness, and in their properties there was the right of the beggar and the mahroom (the poor who does not ask from others)." [al-Dhaariyaat 51:17-19]. Reading about how the salaf achieved the qualities of true worshippers is something that fills one with admiration and makes one try to follow their example. For example, they used to complete the recitation of one-seventh of the Qur'aan every day; they used to pray at night (qiyaam al-layl) even when they were fighting on military campaigns; they used to remember Allaah and pray tahajjud even in prison, standing on their feet with tears streaming down their cheeks, thinking about the creation of heaven and earth. One of them would lie down next to his wife until she slept, just as a mother lies down next to her child to get him to sleep, then he would slip away from the bed to pray qiyaam al-layl. They divided their nights between themselves and their wives, and their days between fasting, studying, teaching, attending funerals, visiting the sick and attending to people's needs. In some cases, years passed and they never missed the takbeerat al-ihraam (beginning of the prayer) with the imaam; they would wait for prayer after prayer. One of them would check on his brother's children after his brother died, spending on them for years. In this way their faith would increase.

Not exhausting oneself (avoiding "burnout"). Doing acts of worship continually or striving one's utmost does not mean that we have to fall into the trap of

becoming bored and fed up. The idea is that we should not give up striving in worship when we have the energy and inclination, and when we feel tired, we should just do as much as we can. All of these ideas are indicated in the ahaadeeth, such as when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection…" (Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 39). According to another report, he said: "Be moderate, and you will reach what you want." (Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 6099. Al-Bukhaari (may Allaah have mercy on him) entitled the chapter Baab ma yukrah min al-Tashdeed fi'l-'Ibaadah (Chapter on what is disliked of extremism in worship)). Anas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) entered (the mosque) and saw a rope strung between two pillars. He said, 'What is this rope for?' They said, 'This rope belongs to Zaynab, when she feels tired, she holds on to it.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, 'No, untie it. Let one of you pray so long as he has the energy, and when he feels tired, let him sit down.'" (Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 1099). When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) learnt that 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas was staying up to pray (qiyaam al-layl) the whole night, and fasting for days on end, he told him not to do that, and explained why: "If you do that, your eyes will become weak (because of staying up late too often), and you will feel exhausted." The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Do what you can of (good) deeds, for Allaah will never get tired although you get tired. The most beloved deed to Allaah is the one that is continuous, even if it is little." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 3/38).

Making up for what one has missed. 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "If a person sleeps and misses the part of the Qur'aan that he was supposed to read at night, or a part of it, and then reads it between Salaat al-Fajr and Salaat al-Zuhr, it will be recorded for him as if he read it at night." (Reported by al-Nisaa'i and others, al-Mujtaba, 2/68; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1228). 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: "The Messenger of Allaah

(peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), if he prayed a prayer, he would always do it. If he missed praying at night because sleep or pain overwhelmed him, he would pray twelve rak'ahs during the day." (Reported by Ahmad, 6/95). When Umm Salamah (may Allaah be pleased with her) saw him praying two rak'ahs after 'Asr and asked him why, he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told her: "O daughter of Abu Umayyah, you asked about the two rak'ahs (I prayed) after 'Asr. Some people came to me from 'Abd al-Qays, and distracted me from praying the two rak'ahs after Zuhr, so these two rak'ahs are what I prayed just now." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, Fath, 3/105). If he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not pray four rak'ahs before Zuhr, he would pray them afterwards. (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no 426; Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi, no. 727). If he missed the four rak'ahs before Zuhr, he would pray them after Zuhr. (Saheeh al-Jaami', 4759). These ahaadeeth indicate that one should make up sunan rawaatib (Sunnah acts that are done regularly) when one misses them. Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) made more than three points about the Prophet's fasting in Sha'baan, the first of which was that he used to fast three days in every month, but maybe he had been distracted from this fasting for several months, so he put them together to make up for what he had missed before the obligatory fast (i.e., Ramadaan) came. (Tahdheeb Sunan Abi Dawood, 3/318). He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to remain in retreat (I'tikaaf) during the last ten days of Ramadaan, but when he missed it one year because of travelling, the following year he spent twenty days in I'tikaaf. (Fath al-Baari, 4/285).

Hoping that one's deeds will be accepted whilst fearing that they may not. After striving one's utmost in deeds of worship and obedience, one should fear that they may be rejected. 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: "I asked the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about this aayah (interpretation of the meaning): 'And those who give that (their charity) which they give with their hearts full of fear (whether it has been accepted or not)…' [al-Mu'minoon 23:60] – were they those who drink alcohol and steal? He said, 'No, O daughter of al-Siddeeq. They are those who fast and pray and give charity whilst fearing that these deeds will not be accepted from them. "It is

these who race for the good deeds" [al-Mu'minoon 23:61 – interpretation of the meaning].'" (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, 3175; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 1/162). Abu'l-Darda' (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "To be certain that Allaah would accept just one prayer from me would be dearer to me than the world and everything in it, for Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): 'Verily, Allaah accepts only from those who are al-muttaqoon (the pious).' [al-Maa'idah 5:27]. " (Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 3/67). Among the attributes of the believer is looking down on one's own self when it comes to fulfilling one's duties towards Allaah (i.e., always thinking that one has not done enough or done them properly). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "If a man were to be dragged on his face from the day he was born until the day he died of old age in order to earn the pleasure of Allaah, he would think that was too little on the Day of Resurrection. (Reported by Imaam Ahmad, al-Musnad, 4/184; Saheeh al-Jaami', 5249). Whoever knows Allaah and knows himself will see clearly that whatever good deeds he may accomplish will not be enough, even if he brought the good deeds of all of the two races (men and jinn), but Allaah, may He be glorified, accepts them by His grace and mercy, and rewards for them by His grace and mercy.

Doing a variety of acts of worship. It is a part of the mercy and wisdom of Allaah that He has given us a variety of acts of worship to do, some of which are physical, such as salaah, some financial, such as zakaah, and some combine both physical and financial aspects, such as Hajj. Some of them are spoken, such as dhikr and du'aa'. One type of worship may be divided into fard (obligatory) and sunnah mustahabbah (encouraged), both of which also vary. For example ,the (sunnah) prayers number 12 rak'ahs, some of which are lower in status, such as the four rak'ahs before 'Asr and Salaat al-Duhaa, and some are higher in status, such as Salaat al-Layl (praying at night). There are also different ways of doing these prayers, such as praying them two by two (as a series of two-rak'ah prayers), or four by four. Witr could be five or seven or nine rak'ahs, ending with one tashahhud. Whoever tries to do acts of worship will find a great variety in numbers, times, ways, types and rulings. Perhaps the wisdom behind this is so that no one will get bored; instead his interest will constantly be renewed. People

are not all the same, and they do not have the same motivation all the time or the same abilities. Some people may enjoy some kinds of worship more than others. Glory be to the One Who has made gates of Paradise according to different types of worship, as is stated in the hadeeth narrated by Abu Hurayrah. According to this hadeeth, the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever spends on a pair for the sake of Allaah will be called from the gates of Paradise, 'O slave of Allaah, this is good.' Whoever is one of the people of prayer will be called from the gate of prayer. Whoever is one of the people of jihaad will be called from the gate of jihaad. Whoever is one of the people of fasting will be called from the gate of al-Rayyaan. Whoever is one of the people of charity will be called from the gate of charity." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, no. 1798). What is meant here is those who do a lot of different types of naafil (supererogatory) deeds. As far as fard deeds are concerned, there is no option – they must be done by all. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The father is the middle gate of Paradise" (reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 1900; Saheeh al-Jaami', 7145), meaning honouring and respecting one's parents. This variety is of benefit in dealing with weakness of faith by doing more of the acts of worship to which one has an inclination, as well as continuing to do obligatory acts which Allaah has commanded us to do. Thus when the Muslim refers to the texts which speak about acts of worship, he will find unique types of worship which will have a beautiful effect on his soul, an effect which can be found nowhere else. Two examples of this are as follows:

Abu Dharr (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There are three whom Allaah loves and three whom Allaah hates. As for the three whom Allaah loves, (they are) a man who meets a group of the enemy, so he keeps fighting them until he is killed or he penetrates (the enemy lines) for his companions to follow; people whose journey at night becomes so long that they long to touch the ground, so they make camp, but one of them stays aside and prays until he wakes them up to resume their journey; and a man who has a neighbour who disturbs him but he bears the annoyance with patience until they are separated by the death or departure of one of them. (Musnad Ahmad, 5/151; Saheeh al-Jaami', 3074).

A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) complaining that his heart was hard. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to him, "Would you like your heart to become soft and to get what you want? Show mercy to the orphan, pat his head, feed him from your own food, and your heart will become soft and you will get what you want." (Hadeeth reported by al-Tabaraani; there are also corroborating reports. See al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 2/533). This has direct relevance to the topic of dealing with weak faith.

Fearing a bad end, because this will motivate the Muslim to worship Allaah and will renew the faith in his heart. There are many causes of a bad end, including weakness of faith and indulging in sin. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) mentioned examples of this, such as: "The one who kills himself with a piece of iron will have the piece of iron in his hand, stabbing himself with it in the fire of Hell, for ever and ever, without end. Whoever drinks poison and kills himself will be sipping it – drinking it and swallowing it slowly – in the fire of Hell, for ever and ever, without end. Whoever throws himself down from a mountain and kills himself, will be throwing himself down in the fire of Hell, for ever and ever, without end." (Saheeh Muslim, no. 109). Some such events happened during the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), such as the man who was with the Muslim army, fighting in a manner unlike anyone else (i.e., recklessly). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "He is one of the people of Hell." One of the Muslim men followed him to see why. The man was wounded severely and he wanted to hasten his death, so he put his sword against his chest and leaned on it, killing himself. (The story is in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, al-Fath, 7/471). The stories of how people met with a bad end are many, and the scholars have explained a number of them. For example, Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in his book al-Da' wa'l-Dawa' that one of them was told, when he was dying, to say "La ilaaha ill-Allaah," and he said, "I cannot say it." Another was told to say La ilaaha ill-Allaah, and he started humming a song. A businessman whose trade had made him forget the remembrance of Allaah was told, when death was imminent, to say La ilaaha ill-Allaah, and he started to say, "This is a good piece,

this fits you, this is a bargain" and so on, until he died. (Tareeq al-Hijratayn, p. 308). It was reported that when one of the soldiers of the king al-Naasir was dying, his son started telling him to say La ilaaha ill-Allaah, but he said, "Al-Naasir is my master." His son kept saying the same thing, and his father kept repeating "Al-Naasir is my master, al-Naasir is my master," then he died. Another was told to say La ilaaha ill-Allaah, but instead he said, "Such-and-such a house, repair this and that in it; such-and-such a garden, do this and that in it." One of those who deal in interest was told to say La ilaaha ill-Allaah when he was dying, but he started to say, "Ten for eleven," repeating it until he died. (Al-Da' wa'l-Dawa', pp. 170, 289). Some of them turned black, or turned away from the Qiblah. Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "I heard one of those in whom I thought there was a lot of good saying on the night of his death, 'My Lord is treating me unjustly' – exalted be Allaah above what he said! He accused Allaah of being unjust on his deathbed." Then Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "I remained depressed and in despair of finding something that would help me when I face that day (my own death)." (Sayd al-Khawaatir, 137). Subhaan-Allaah, how often have people seen this, but they do not know about what really happened to those who were about to die; they do not know the half of it." (al-Da' wal-Dawa', 171)

Remember death often. The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Remember often the destroyer of pleasure, meaning death." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 2307; Saheeh al-Jaami', 1210). Remembering death deters one from sin and softens the hard heart. No one remembers death at the time of hardship but he will feel ease, and no one remembers death at the time of ease but he will feel constricted. One of the things that remind a person of death most is visiting graveyards, so the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded us to visit them. He said, "I used to forbid you to visit graves, but now (go and) visit them, for this softens the heart, makes the eyes weep and reminds one of the Hereafter, and do not speak in an obscene manner." (Reported by al-Haakim, 1/376; Saheeh al-Jaami', 4584). The Muslim is even permitted to visit the graves of kuffaar in order to derive a lesson from this. The evidence for this is the report in al-Saheeh which says that he visited his

mother's grave and wept, making those around him weep too. He said, "I asked my Lord for permission to ask for forgiveness for her, and He did not allow me to do so, then I asked Him for permission to visit her grave, and He granted me permission, so visit graves, for they remind one of death." (Reported by Muslim, 3/65). Visiting graves is one of the best means of softening the heart. The visitor benefits from remembering death, and the dead benefit from the du'aa's offered for them. An example of this reported in the Sunnah is when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Peace be upon you, O dwellers of this place, believers and Muslims. May Allaah have mercy upon those of us who have gone on before and those who will follow later. In sha Allaah we will join you soon." (Reported by Muslim, no. 974). The one who wants to visit graves should observe the correct etiquette and have the proper presence of mind when approaching them. The purpose of his visit should be to earn the pleasure of Allaah and to reform his corrupt heart, and also to learn a lesson from those who are under the ground, cut off from their families and loved ones. He should think about the condition of his brothers who have passed away, how they achieved their worldly ambitions and gathered wealth, but then were cut off from all of that and their wealth is no longer of any avail to them. The earth has wiped out the beauty of their faces, their bodies have disintegrated in the grave, their wives have become widows and their children have become orphans. Let him remember the error of being deceived by material means and of relying on good health, youth and the inclination towards leisure, for he will inevitably share their fate. Let him think of the state of the deceased, how his legs are destroyed, his eyes have become liquid, the worms have eaten his tongue, and the earth has consumed his teeth. (Adapted from al-Tadhkirah by al-Qurtubi, p. 16ff).

[Poetry omitted]

Whoever remembers death frequently will benefit in three ways: he will hasten to repent, he will become content, and he will be active in worship. Whoever forgets death will be punished in three ways: he will delay repentance, he will no longer be content with what is sufficient, and he will be lazy in worship. One of the effective ways of reminding oneself about death is to see those who are about to die, for seeing the dead, witnessing the death throes and thinking about

how a person looks after he has died will put an end to empty pleasure and keep one awake at night, and will motivate one to do good works and to strive harder. Al-Hasan al-Basri once went to visit a sick person and found him in the throes of death, so he saw the distress and anguish that had befallen him. He went back to his family with a different colour from when he had left them (i.e., he was visibly shaken by what he had seen). They said to him, "Come and eat, may Allaah have mercy on you." He said, "O my family, go ahead, eat and drink. I have seen death, and I shall never stop working hard until I meet it." (Al-Tadhkirah, 17).

One way of increasing awareness of death is to attend funerals, carrying the deceased on one's shoulders, going to the graveyard, participating in the burial and throwing earth into the grave. This reminds one of the Hereafter, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Visit the sick and attend funerals; this will remind you of the Hereafter." (Reported by Ahmad, 3/48; Saheeh al-Jaami', 4109). In addition to that, attending funerals brings a great reward, as was stated by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "Whoever attends a funeral from the house [of the deceased] {according to one report: whoever attends the funeral of a Muslim out of faith and in hope of reward} until he prays for the deceased, will have one qeeraat, and whoever attends until the person is buried will have two qeeraats of reward." It was said, "O Messenger of Allaah, what are the two qeeraats?" He said, "Like two great mountains." {According to another report: "Each qeeraat is like [Mount] Uhud."}. (Reported by the two shaykhs and others. The above is compiled from a number of reports. Ahkaam al-Janaa'iz by al-Albaani, p. 67).

The salaf (may Allaah have mercy on them) used to think of death when they advised a person who was committing a sin. One of the salaf (may Allaah have mercy on him), when there was a man in his presence gossiping about another, warned him by saying, "Remember the cotton which they will put on your eyes," i.e., when shrouding him for burial.

Remembering the different levels of status in the Hereafter. Ibn al-Qayyim (may

Allaah have mercy on him) said: "If his mind is clear, he will have insight, which is a light in the heart, with which he will see the promise and the threat, Paradise and Hell, and what Allaah has prepared in each for His friends and His enemies, respectively. He will see, in his mind's eye, the people coming forth from their graves, hastening towards the call of Truth; the angels coming down from heaven and surrounding them, and Allaah coming to His Throne which is set up for judgement; the earth filled with His light and the Book being set forth; the Prophets and martyrs being brought; the scale being set up and the records flying into their owner's hands; the disputants being brought together; every creditor hanging on to his opponent; the appearance of the hawd (cistern) and the bringing near of its cups; intense thirst, but only a few being allowed to drink; the setting up of the bridge and the jostling of the people to cross over it; the sharing out of lights because the bridge to be crossed is very dark; the Fire of Hell, parts of it consuming other parts beneath the bridge; the huge numbers of those who fall into the Fire, many times more than the numbers of those who are saved. When his mind's eye is opened to all of this, one of the stages of the Hereafter will dwell in his heart, so he will see that the Hereafter will abide forever whereas as this world is just a transient, passing thing. (Madaarij al-Saalikeen, 1/123). The Qur'aan frequently describes scenes of the Last Day, in Soorahs such as Qaaf, al-Waaqi'ah, al-Qiyaamah, al-Mursalaat, al-Naba', al-Mutaffifeen and al-Takweer. The books of hadeeth also mention this, in chapters such as those on al-qiyaamah (resurrection), al-riqaaq (reports that soften the heart), al-Jannah (Paradise), and al-Naar (Hell). It is also important to read the books of scholars on this subject, such as Haadi al-Arwaah by Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Nihaayah fi'l-Fitan wa'l-Malaahim by Ibn Katheer, al-Tadhkirah fi Ahwaal al-Mawtaa wa Umoor al-Aakhirah by al-Qurtubi, al-Qiyaamah al-Kubraa and al-Jannah wa'l-Naar by 'Umar al-Ashqar, and others. The point here is that one of the things that increase faith is knowledge about the events of the Day of Judgement, such as the resurrection and bringing forth from the graves, the gathering, intercession, the reckoning, reward and punishment, the scales, the cistern, the siraat (bridge over Hell), and the place of eternal abode, Paradise or Hell.

Interacting with the signs of Allaah that exist in the Universe. Al-Bukhaari, Muslim and others report that when the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) saw a cloud or noticed a wind, this would be visible in his face. 'Aa'ishah said, "O Messenger of Allaah, I see that when the people see a cloud they are happy, because they hope it will bring rain, but I see that when you see a cloud, it is clear from your face that you do not like it." He said, "O 'Aa'ishah, how can I be sure that there is no punishment in it, for some people were punished by the wind, and some people saw their punishment but said, 'This is a cloud bringing us rain!' [al-Ahqaaf 46:24 – interpretation of the meaning]." (Reported by Muslim, 899). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to be alarmed when he saw an eclipse, as is reported in Saheeh al-Bukhaari from Abu Moosa (may Allaah be pleased with him): "The sun was eclipsed, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stood up in alarm, fearing that it was the Hour." (Fath al-Baari, 2/545). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded us, in the event of an eclipse, to hasten to pray. He told us that both solar and lunar eclipses are among the signs with which Allaah instills fear in His slaves. There is no doubt that the heart's interaction with these phenomena and its alarmed reaction renew faith in the heart, and remind one of Allaah's punishment, wrath, might and power. 'Aa'ishah said: "The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) took my hand then pointed to the moon and said, 'O 'Aa'ishah, seek refuge with Allaah from the evil of this, for this is "the darkening (night) as it comes with its darkness" [al-Falaq 113:3 – interpretation of the meaning].''" (Reported by Ahmad, 6/237; al-Silsilat al-Saheehah). Another example is being affected and moved when passing by places which were struck by the punishment of Allaah, or passing the graves of wrongdoers. Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to his Companions, when they reached al-Hijr [??], "Do not enter upon these places which were punished by Allaah, unless you do so weeping. If you do not weep, then do not enter them, lest what befell them befall you also." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, no. 423). Yet people nowadays go to such places as tourists and take pictures there. Go figure!

Dhikr (remembrance of Allaah) is a very important method of dealing with weak faith. It brings cleansing and healing to the heart that is suffering disease, and it is the very spirit of righteous deeds. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "O you who believe! Remember Allaah with much remembrance" [al-Ahzaab 33:41]. Allaah promises success to those who remember Him much (interpretation of the meaning): "… and remember the Name of Allaah much, so that you may be successful." [al-Anfaal 8:45]. The remembrance of Allaah is greater than everything else, as He says (interpretation of the meaning): "… (and the remembering (praising, etc.) of (you by) Allaah (in front of the angels) is greater indeed [than your remembering Allaah in prayers etc.]…" [al-'Ankaboot 29:45]. This was the advice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to the man who thought that the duties of Islam were too much; he told him: "Keep your tongue wet with the remembrance of Allaah." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi, 3375; he said, this is a hasan ghareeb hadeeth, See also Saheeh al-Kalim, 3). Dhikr pleases al-Rahmaan (the Most Merciful) and keeps away the Shaytaan. It dispels worry and distress, and brings provision and opens the door to knowledge. It plants the seedlings of Paradise and helps one to avoid the evils of the tongue. It offers consolation to the poor who do not have the means to give charity; Allaah has compensated them with dhikr, which takes the place of physical and financial acts of worship. Neglecting dhikr and not remembering Allaah cause hardness in the heart.

[poetry omitted]

So the person who wishes to remedy his weakness of faith must increase his remembrance of Allaah. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): "… And remember your Lord when you forget…" [al-Kahf 18:24]. Allaah explains the effect that dhikr has on the heart (interpretation of the meaning): "…Verily, in the remembrance of Allaah do hearts find rest." [al-Ra'd 13:28]. Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said, concerning the remedy of dhikr: "In the heart there is hardness which can only be softened by remembrance of Allaah, may He be exalted. So the slave must treat the hardness of his heart with the remembrance of Allaah, may He be exalted. A man said to al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allaah have mercy on him), 'O Abu Sa'eed, I am complaining to you of the

hardness of my heart.' He said, 'Soften it with dhikr.' The more forgetful the heart is, the harder it becomes, but if a person remembers Allaah, that hardness softens as copper melts in the fire. Nothing can soften the hardness of the heart like the remembrance of Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted. Dhikr is healing and medicine for the heart. Forgetfulness is a disease, the cure for which is remembrance of Allaah. Makhool said: 'Remembrance of Allaah is a cure and remembrance of people is a disease.'" (Al-Waabil al-Sayib wa Raafi' al-Kalim al-Tayyib, 142).

By means of dhikr, the slave can overcome the Shaytaan, just as the Shaytaan overcomes those who are neglectful and forgetful. One of the salaf said: "When dhikr becomes well-established in the heart, if the Shaytaan gets too close, a person can defeat him. Then the shayateen gather around him (the shaytaan who tried to get close to the heart of the believer) and say, 'What is wrong with this one?' and it is said, 'He was harmed by a human!' (Madaarij al-Saalikeen, 2/424). Most of the people who are harmed by the shayaateen are neglectful people who do not protect themselves with awraad and adhkaar (du'aa's and prayers), so it is easy for the shayaateen to overwhelm them.

For some of those who complain of weakness of faith, it is difficult for them to do some of the things that can cure it, such as praying qiyaam al-layl or observing naafil acts of worship. It is appropriate for them to begin with this kind of treatment (i.e., dhikr) and be eager to do it. They should learn some general adhkar which they can recite continually, such as "Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah la shareeka lah, lahu'l-mulk wa lahu'l-hamd, wa huwa 'ala kulli shay'in qadeer (There is no god but Allaah, He has no partner; to Him be the sovereignty and the praise, and He is Able to do all things)," and "Subhaan Allaahi wa bi-hamdih, wa subhaan Allaah il-'Azeem (Praise and glory be to Allaah, and glory be to Allaah the Almighty)," and "La hawla wa la quwwata illa billaah (There is no strength and no power except in Allaah)," and so on. They should also memorize the du'aa's which according to the Sunnah should be recited at certain times or in certain places, such as in the morning and evening, when going to sleep, when waking up, when seeing visions and dreams, when eating, when going to

the bathroom, when travelling, when rain falls, when hearing the adhaan, when going to the mosque, when making a decision (istikhaarah), when stricken with calamity, when visiting graveyards, when there is wind, when seeing the new moon, when getting into or onto a means of transportation, when greeting someone, when sneezing, when one hears the cock crow or the donkey bray or the dog bark, when a gathering comes to an end, when seeing someone who is afflicted with suffering, and so on. No doubt whoever perseveres with this will see a direct effect on his heart. (Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah wrote a very useful book on the topic of adhkaar, entitled Al-Kalim al-Tayyib, which has been abridged by al-Albaani under the title Saheeh al-Kalim al-Tayyib).

Confiding in Allaah and humbling oneself before Him. The more the slave humbles himself before Allaah, the closer he becomes to Him. Thus the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The closest the slave can be to Allaah is when he is prostrating to Him, so make lots of du'aa' then." (Reported by Muslim, 482). Prostration is the position of humility, quite unlike any other posture or position. When the slave puts his forehead – the highest part of his body – on the ground, he becomes as close as he can be to his Lord. Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) spoke in the most eloquent terms expressing humility before Allaah and the contrition of the one who repents to Him: "Oh how sweet are the words of the one who speaks thus: 'I ask You by Your power and my humility to show mercy to me. I ask You by Your strength and my weakness, by Your independence of me and my dependence upon You. Here is my lying, sinful forelock in Your hands. Your slaves other than me are so many, and I have no refuge or sanctuary from You except with You. I ask You in the manner of the poor and wretched, I pray to You in the manner of one who humbly submits, I call on You in the manner of one who is fearful and blind, one whose neck is totally bowed to You, whose eyes shed tears for you, whose heart is humbled before You.' When the slave comes whispering words such as these, his faith multiplies exponentially in his heart."

Showing one's need for Allaah also strengthens faith. Allaah has told us how